

Del. 1 delays expected

Finishing touches will hinder traffic

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Delaware commuters looking forward to clear sailing on a finished Del. 1 from Odessa to Dover first must endure a few days of congestion on U.S. 13 in and around Smyrna, state officials said Monday.

Department of Transportation officials on Monday laid out their plans for separating Del. 1 and U.S. 13 north of Smyrna during a 44-hour period from 6 p.m. on May 18 to 2 p.m. on May 20. In that time, lanes will be closed or restricted in both directions of Del. 1 and U.S. 13 in the Smyrna area.

"We've got a lot of commuters, and this is going to affect all of them," said Mike Williams, a spokesman for DelDOT. The 8-mile section of Del. 1 between Odessa and Smyrna is the final piece in the limited-access highway begun more than 12 years ago.

To complete the job, crews will close northbound Del. 1 at the south Smyrna interchange at 6 p.m. May 18, and route all traffic onto U.S. 13 through Smyrna. Traffic will rejoin northbound Del. 1 at Sycamore Farms, just south of Odessa.

The closure and detours are necessary so construction crews can build a temporary two-lane connection between the existing northbound lanes of Del. 1 and the new Del. 1 segment in north Smyrna, said David Duke, project resident engineer for the Del. 1 construction project. Construction of the permanent northbound connection will not be finished until July.

The temporary link should be done by 2 p.m. May 20, allowing northbound Del. 1 to be fully opened from south Smyrna to Odessa.

Work on the southbound lanes is less complicated because the permanent tie-in already is done. But construction crews must stripe the road and put barriers in place at the south and north ends. The new lanes of southbound Del. 1, from Sycamore Farms to north of Smyrna, will open by 6 a.m. May 19.

There also will be lane restrictions along U.S. 13 at the north Smyrna junction of the roads. Crews in coming months will be rebuilding the old section of U.S. 13 to complete the separation of the two highways.

DelDOT officials concede it's a tricky, cumbersome construction schedule, and that the best advice for motorists is to stay away if at all possible.

Officials are recommending travelers use Del. 9 and Del. 15 to get around the trouble spots.

"If you can't, just give yourself plenty of time and leave early," Duke said.